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'Comédie de la soif' (1872)1. *Les Parents*

Nous sommes tes Grands-Parents,
 Les Grands!
 Couverts des froides sueurs
 De la lune et des verdure.
 Nos vins secs avaient du cœur!
 Au soleil sans imposture
 Que faut-il à l'homme? boire.
 MOI - Mourir aux fleuves barbares. 8

Nous sommes tes Grands-Parents
 Des champs.
 L'eau est au fond des osiers:
 Vois le courant du fossé
 Autour du Château mouillé.
 Descendons en nos celliers;
 Après, le cidre et le lait.
 MOI - Aller où boivent les vaches. 16

Nous sommes tes Grands-Parents;
 Tiens, prends
 Les liqueurs dans nos armoires;
 Le Thé, le Café, si rares,
 Frémissent dans les bouilloires
 - Vois les images, les fleurs.
 Nous rentrons du cimetière.
 MOI - Ah! tarir toutes les urnes! 24

2. *L'Esprit*

Éternelles Ondines, 25
 Divisez l'eau fine.
 Vénus, sœur de l'azur,
 Émeus le flot pur.

Juifs errants de Norwège, 29
 Dites-moi la neige.
 Anciens exilés chers,
 Dites-moi la mer.

MOI - Non, plus ces boissons pures, 33
 Ces fleurs d'eau pour verres;
 Légendes ni figures
 Ne me désaltèrent;

Chansonnier, ta filleule 37
 C'est ma soif si folle;
 Hyde intime sans gueules
 Qui mine et désole.

3. *Les Amis*

Viens, les Vins sont aux plages, 41
 Et les flots, par millions!
 Vois le Bitter sauvage
 Rouler du haut des monts!

Gagnons, pèlerins sages
 L'Absinthe aux verts piliers...
 MOI - Plus ces paysages. 47
 Qu'est l'ivresse, Amis?

J'aime autant, mieux, même,
 Pourrir dans l'étang,
 Sous l'affreuse crème,
 Près des bois flottants.

4. *Le Pauvre songe*

Peut-être un soir m'attend 53
 Où je boirai tranquille
 En quelque vieille Ville,
 Et mourrai plus content:
 Puisque je suis patient!

Si mon mal se résigne, 58
 Si j'ai jamais quelque or,
 Choisirai-je le Nord
 Ou le Pays des Vignes?...
 - Ah! songer est indigne

Puisque c'est pure perte! 63
 Et si je redeviens
 Le voyageur ancien,
 Jamais l'auberge verte
 Ne peut bien m'être ouverte.

5. *Conclusion*

Les pigeons qui tremblent dans la prairie, 68
 Le gibier, qui court et qui voit la nuit,
 Les bêtes des eaux, la bête asservie,
 Les derniers papillons!... ont soif aussi.

Mais fondre où fond ce nuage sans guide, 72
 - Oh! favorisé de ce qui est frais!
 Expirer en ces violettes humides
 Dont les aurores chargent ces forêts?

'Comedy of thirst'*1. The Relations*

We are your Grandparents,
 The Grown-ups!
 Covered with the cold sweats
 Of the moon and greenery.
 Our dry wines had heart!
 Beneath the sun, free of all pretence,
 What is necessary for man? to drink.
 ME - To die by the barbarous rivers. 8

We are your Grandparents
 Of the fields.
 The water is below the rushes:
 See the current of the moat
 Around the dank castle.
 Let's go down to our cellars;
 After, cider and milk.
 ME - To go where the cows drink. 16

We are your Grandparents;
 Here, take
 The liquors in our cupboards;
 Tea, coffee, so rare,
 Simmer in the kettles
 - See the pictures, the flowers.
 We're returning from the graveyard.
 ME - Oh! to dry up all the urns! 24

2. The Spirit

Eternal Water Spirits, 25
 Divide the fine water.
 Venus, sister of the azure,
 Move the pure wave.

Wandering Jews of Norway, 29
 Tell me of the snow.
 Dear ancient exiles,
 Tell me of the sea.

ME - No, no more of these pure drinks, 33
 These water-flowers for cups;
 Neither legends nor figures
 Can quench my thirst;

Singer, your godchild 37
 Is my truly maddening thirst;
 Intimate, mouthless hydra
 That consumes and ravages.

3. The Friends

Come, the Wines are at the beaches, 41
 And waves, in their millions!
 See the savage Bitter
 Roll from the mountaintops!

Let's reach, wise pilgrims,
 The Absinthe of green pillars...
 ME - No more of these landscapes. 47
 What is drunkenness, Friends?

I'd like as much, better, even,
 To rot in the pond,
 Beneath the horrible cream,
 Beside floating logs.

4. The Pauper dreams

Perhaps an evening awaits me 53
 When, calm, I'll drink
 In some old Town,
 And I'll die happier:
 Because I'm patient!

If my suffering ever ends, 58
 If I ever have some gold,
 Will I choose the North
 Or the Land of Vineyards?...
 - Oh! dreaming is shameful

Because it's pure loss! 63
 And if I again become
 The traveller of yore,
 Never can the green resting-place
 Truly be open to me.

5. Conclusion

The pigeons who tremble in the meadow, 68
 The game, which runs and watches the night,
 The water creatures, the enslaved beast,
 The last butterflies!... are thirsty, too.

But to dissolve where that aimless cloud dissolves, 72
 - Oh! favoured by what is fresh!
 To die in those damp violets
 Whose dawns fill these forests?

Abstract

Arthur Rimbaud's verse poetry of 1872 is steeped in the complexities of the relationship between humanity and its surroundings: the ecological theme and irregular prosody of 'Comédie de la soif', in which the narrator senses a lost affinity with nature, interface with human/nonhuman interaction and conflict, raising questions about environmental responsibilities and the role of the nonhuman world in forming communal values. By combining biochemical notions with close prosodic analysis, an ecopoetic sense of *crisis* can be deconstructed in this key work of nineteenth-century French literature.

Keywords

ecopoetics; French versification; environmentalism; urbanization

Contributor

Daniel Finch-Race is a Research Scholar at Trinity College in the University of Cambridge. As part of his doctoral work on the 1861 edition of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*, he is investigating the ways in which studies of nineteenth-century French versification can be enhanced using ecocritical perspectives. Following his analysis of masculine hegemony and feminine alterity in Baudelaire's "À une mendiante rousse" (*French Studies Bulletin*), his forthcoming articles focus on ecopoetic ruminations in Baudelaire's "Je n'ai pas oublié" and "La Servante au grand cœur" (*Green Letters*), and on placelessness in Baudelaire's "Les Sept Vieillards" and "Les Petites Vieilles" (*Modern Language Review*).

Society versus nature: ecopoetic implications

In nineteenth-century France, the devaluation of the connection between humanity and the nonhuman world caused by industrialization led to a rapport based upon societal exploitation of nature for sustenance and profit, as well as to a quantitative and qualitative breakdown of the delicate ecosystemic balance between humanity and its surroundings. Nature, once perceived as unassailably grand, was pitted against the increasing technological ability and ambition of civilization. Moulded into parks and other green spaces encircled by humanity, the nonhuman world was forced to submit to the will of society. Arthur Rimbaud's verse poetry of 1872 is entwined with the degradation of his environment, particularly in 'Comédie de la soif' ['Comedy of Thirst'], in which the narrator-poet is perturbed by a sense of disconnection from the nonhuman world, in line with Giorgio Agamben's evocation in *The Open* of 'the absence of a nature proper to *Homo*, [leaving] him suspended between a celestial and a terrestrial nature, between animal and human' (Agamben 2004: 29). The resultant human/nonhuman dichotomy stirs up the idea of society interfering in ecological processes, as well as the reaction of nature to this upset. Rimbaud's observation of the 'derniers papillons [last butterflies]' (71) and his allegorical exclusion from 'l'auberge verte [the green resting-place]' (66) is thus particularly redolent of the disconnectedness and isolation of nineteenth-century French citizens in the wake of industrialization.

The premise of intense interaction with nature as a basis for a more enlightened relationship between humanity and the nonhuman world may well have stimulated Rimbaud's interest in the environment. He realizes that the desire of industrializing society to gain mastery over the nonhuman world is far from sustainable, since technological advances increasingly subdue nature. Rimbaud's prosodic subversion and ecopoetic allusions could represent a wish to reconnect synaesthetically with his surroundings by discovering what Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time* terms '*Stimmung*' (Heidegger 1962: 172), a mood or calling attuned to the natural environment. The presence of ecological phenomena and lack of technology in 'Comédie de la soif' foregrounds a potential essentialist solution to humanity's difficulties in understanding the communal and ethical

implications of the increasing subjection of nature. The devalued relationship between society and the environment is underscored by the melancholic reaction of the narrator-poet to oversophistication: 'Non, plus ces boissons pures,/Ces fleurs d'eau pour verres [No, no more of these pure drinks,/These water-flowers for cups]' (33–34). Rimbaud indexes the shortcomings of humanity against environmental phenomena, providing insight into the human implications of rapid industrialization, as well as into the voiding of communal paradigms (given the decreasing currency of mythical beliefs in a world ruled by scientific logic): 'Légendes ni figures/Ne me désaltèrent [Neither legends nor figures/Can quench my thirst]' (35–36). 'Comédie de la soif' challenges tradition by focalizing environmental concerns, corroborating Jacques Rancière's contention in *Mute Speech* of 'the unique configuration within the "new poetics" in which silent things take on a language of their own' (Rancière 2011: 14). Rimbaud seeks to understand the relationship between human essences and the environment, ostensibly in the hope of social regeneration. This will be achieved by empowering more thoughtful, ecosensitive responses to modernization, in contrast to the pyrotechnic pursuit of progress that has upset the balance of human-nature relations (to the pauper's dismay): 'Jamais l'auberge verte/Ne peut bien m'être-ouverte [Never can the green inn/Truly be open to me]' (66–67).

The key issues of 'Comédie de la soif' are channelled through musical, psychological and ecopoetic phenomena, implying a need to examine factors such as entropy and ecosystemic feedback in order to illuminate the complex interaction of human consciousness and ecological processes. In this regard, Etienne Terblanche's theoretical foundation in *E. E. Cummings* is valuable: 'at the centre of the poetic projects which we now refer to as modernist exists a radical openness towards and engagement with concrete, physical life on earth – and the actuality of its dynamic continuation or unfolding' (Terblanche 2012: 12). As a counterpart to ecopoetic discussion of images dealing with human/nonhuman connections, this study will engage in prosodic analysis,¹ in an attempt to elucidate the mechanics of an impetus toward pro-environmental thought in 'Comédie de la soif', as part of a dissection of the narrator-poet's psychosocial concerns. What, ultimately, is the significance of the recourse to ecological phenomena in this work, when it is taken as a counterpart to prosodic subversion? What are the ecopoetic implications of deteriorating relations between nature and humanity for Rimbaud?

'Comédie de la soif' (1872): a pro-environmental polemic?

Rimbaud's quinquedecim poem involves three key strands of thought: first, the rejection of obsolete traditions, most evident in '1- Les Parents' ['The Relations'] and '3- Les Amis' ['The Friends']; second, the psychological and spiritual struggles of the narrator-poet, particularly in '2- L'Esprit' ['The Spirit'] and '4- Le Pauvre songe' ['The Pauper Dreams']; third, positively entropic communion with nature and oblivion, foregrounded in '5- Conclusion'. Taken together, the sections entail an ecopoetic revolt against tradition, channelled through dialectics of society versus nature, as well as of old versus new. The anthropocentric experience of 'Les Parents' is extrapolated to the realms of both the artificial and the nonhuman, such that the questions raised by Baudelaire in *Les Fleurs du mal* are pursued as part of Rimbaud's dissection of ecological realities in the wake of industrialization. Rimbaud's ecopoetic reflections develop Romantic thought, challenge societal tenets and subvert prosodic norms, validating Seth Whidden's assertion in *Leaving Parnassus* that 'more dramatically than in his earlier verse poems, which only hint at destabilization, the notions of time and space start coming apart in Rimbaud's verse poetry of 1872' (Whidden 2007: 138). The multifarious form of 'Comédie de la soif' encompasses not only numerous explicit interjections from the narrator-poet in the lines preceded by 'MOI' ['ME'], but also myriad contraventions of prosodic customs: sections with lines containing an even number of syllables (predominantly in parts 4 and 5) are juxtaposed against ones with lines that contain an odd number of syllables (especially in part 1); lines end with only half-rhymes, inadmissible rhymes or a total lack of rhyme; stanzas are composed entirely of masculine or

feminine rhymes; strophic delineation and indentation goes awry, culminating in a part composed of three quintets ('Le Pauvre songe').

Prosodic peculiarities accompany an interrogation of societal mores channelled through an examination of drinking habits, moving from a sense of stasis ('Au soleil sans imposture/Que faut-il à l'homme? boire [Beneath the sun, free of all pretence,/What is necessary for man? to drink]' (6–7)) and quasi-feudality ('Vois le courant du fossé/Autour du Château mouillé [See the current of the moat/Around the dank castle]' (12–13)), to a mythological motif ('Éternelles Ondines/Divisez l'eau fine [Eternal Water Spirits,/Divide the fine water]' (25–26)), preceding drunken stupor ('Gagnons, pèlerins sages/L'Absinthe-aux verts piliers [Let's reach, wise pilgrims,/The Absinthe of green pillars]' (45–46)), discontent ('- Ah! songer est indigne/Puisque c'est pure perte! [- Oh! dreaming is shameful/Because it's pure loss!]' (62–63)) and eco-poetic thirst ('Les derniers papillons!... ont soif aussi [The last butterflies!... are thirsty, too]' (71)). In *La Symbolique de Rimbaud*, Jacques Gengoux interprets this increasingly complicated relationship to alcohol as a 'source d'ivresse, de violence [provoquant] la solitude, la tristesse, après l'excès [aussi bien que] le désir de "redevenir" le voyageur ancien [source of drunkenness, violence provoking solitude, sadness after the excess, as well as the desire to "become again" the wanderer of yore]' (Gengoux 1947: 207). Operating in a manner that implies a poetic space in which ecology and verse are mutually influential (since each prosodic element affects the poetic environment by augmenting meaning, just as a physical action affects the natural world), Rimbaud problematizes the relationship between society and the nonhuman world, as well as the agonizing disintegration of cohesive structures and consciousness. In this way, 'Comédie de la soif' embodies Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands' assertion in her contribution to *Queer Ecologies* that 'pain and displacement are things to be specifically remembered in reflections on nature, ecology and landscape' (Mortimer-Sandilands 2010: 347). The quinquedecim poem deserves to be envisioned as a pro-environmental polemic, given impetus by Rimbaud's adverse reaction to the increasing sophistication of society at the expense of a meaningful relationship with the natural world: 'Non, plus ces boissons pures [No, no more of these pure drinks]' (33); 'Plus ces paysages [No more of these landscapes]' (47). The narrator-poet seeks an alternative ethos of immersion in nature, culminating in positively-entropic communion with the nonhuman world and oblivion: '- Oh! favorisé de ce qui est frais!/Expirer en ces violettes humides [- Oh! favoured by what is fresh!/To die in those damp violets]' (73–74). Rimbaud combats naïve responses to the nonhuman world with an eco-poetic meditation that finds ultimate release in a bond surpassing human/nonhuman demarcations, expressed through figures of liquidity and ecological unity.

'Les Parents' and 'Les Amis': disavowal of outmoded/unsustainable paradigms

The heptasyllabic lines and seven-line (plus one) stanzas of the first part of 'Comédie de la soif' evoke Baudelaire's 'Les Sept Vieillards' ['The Seven Old Men'], with Rimbaud's work developing the premise of discombobulation due to an encounter with spectres of the past. 'Les Parents' ['The Relations'] juxtaposes the monotonous, unsustainable existence of older generations with the poet's blunt and youthful interjections that seek to shock society out of its complacency: 'Ah! tarir toutes les urnes! [Oh! to dry up all the urns!]' (24). The brutal collision of death and politics in the concluding noun is given added emphasis not only by its placement at the end of the part, but also by the lack of rhyme with the concluding statement of the elders: 'Nous rentrons du cimetière [We're returning from the graveyard]' (23). Paul Verlaine's vision in *Les Poètes maudits* of Rimbaud as a talented subversive, in whose work 'le bizarre et l'étrange salent et poivrent l'extrême douceur, la simplicité divine de la pensée et du style [the bizarre and the strange season the extreme gentleness, the divine simplicity of thought and style]' (Verlaine 1979: 25), is borne out by the juxtaposition of the essentialist message of the narrator-poet against the excess and lethargy espoused by the 'Grands-Parents': 'Descendons en nos celliers;/Après, le cidre-et le lait [Let's go down to our cellars;/After, cider and milk]' (14–15). The three 'MOI [ME]' interjections (8; 16; 24), which form the rebellious sentiment of the first part, are all the more startling because the latter two do not rhyme with any

other lines. The first forms only a half-rhyme with the seventh line ('Que faut-il à l'homme? boire [What is necessary for man? to drink]' (7)), to which further subversiveness is added by the possibility of a disjointed rhyme with an incongruent line in the midst of the third septet ('Le Thé, le Café, si rares [Tea, coffee, so rare]' (20)). The 'fleuves barbares [barbarous rivers]' (8) could represent an ideal of untamed nature, insofar as manmade beverages are being juxtaposed with their organic source, highlighting the increasing rarity of contact with unmitigated environmental forces, as well as the presence of ecological elements at the heart of human concepts. Rimbaud underscores the submission of the nonhuman world to the increasingly sophisticated demands of society, while also challenging the calm of an existence in which humanity has become disconnected from its local ecosystem.

All of the rejoinders the MOI makes to 'Les Parents' comprise a liquid element, serving to irrigate the part, and breaking the stasis emphasized in the second septet, in which all of the lines after the introductory quasi-refrain contain the same masculine rhyme. The pattern of stanzaic rhyme can also be interpreted as altered from the first septet (from A-A-B-C-B-C to A-A-D-E-E-D), since 'osiers [rushes]' (11) fits better with 'celliers [cellars]' (14), as does 'fossé [moat]' (12) with 'mouillé [dank]' (13). A preference for visual congruity in the latter case would weaken the rhyme between the 12th and 13th lines, creating a monosyllabically poor combination foregrounding the stagnancy of the water in the moat, in another juxtaposition of 'old-order' stasis against the 'new-order' movement of the 'fleuves barbares [barbarous rivers]' (8). The elderly relations exploit the rural world as a basis for sustenance ('Nos vins secs avaient du cœur! [Our dry wines had heart!]' (5)), whereas the narrator-poet wishes for rebirth in nature after a watery death ('Mourir aux fleuves barbares [To die by the barbarous rivers]' (8)), breaking from cyclical existence. Whidden is insightful here:

Disrupting "les sens" [the senses], disrupting "le monde" [the world]: Rimbaud's approach thus attempts to bring about a new poetic world for the lyric subject by attacking it at its base; all senses, meanings and directions on which it is built. As a result, precious few things will mean what they might seem to mean in this new topsy-turvy poetic universe. In addition to merely disorganizing the five senses, then, Rimbaud brings chaos to traditional forms of absolutes which had gone unquestioned. (Whidden 2007: 127)

The introductory section of 'Comédie de la soif' affirms the necessity of sensuous contact with the natural world for human life, proposing an unconventionally sensitive rapport with the environment in place of an anthropocentric relationship of exploitation.

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'Les Amis' ['The Friends'] promotes an ever stronger contrast between society and the narrator-poet at the mid-point of the poem. It contains the first instance of the ego-centring first-person-singular subject pronoun, set to recur only five more times, all in 'Le Pauvre songe' ['The Pauper Dreams'], the following section. The pentasyllabic lines of the latter half of the third part, in which the MOI ripostes the epicurean position of 'Les Amis', diverge from the hexasyllabic metre in the opening six lines, offering a pointed contrast between the two attitudes (with a striking switch in the midst of the second quatrain, highlighted by the dislocated indentation). Both sides of the argument have the same number of lines to present their ethos, but the narrator-poet has six fewer syllables overall, making the contest between the two sides biased towards the representatives of industrializing society. The ecosensitive lines (with an odd number of syllables), in favour of communion with the environment, are pitted unfavourably against the hedonistic lines (with an even number of syllables), in favour of drunkenness. The presence of nature in the anthropocentric first half is trivializingly hyperbolic ('Vois le Bitter sauvage/Rouler du haut des monts! [See the savage Bitter/Roll from the mountaintops!]' (43–44)), while the inadmissible plural-singular rhyme between 'plages [beaches]'

(41) and 'sauvage [savage]' (43) highlights the nonsensicality of society's exploitation of the nonhuman world, since it transmogrifies wild places into artificial spaces. The contemptuous tone of the first pentasyllabic line, foregrounded by the dash, complements Gabriel Bounoure's assertion in *Le Silence de Rimbaud* that Rimbaud revels in his rural attitude 'parce qu'il méprise silencieusement, ascétiquement "les bêtises", tout ce qui n'est pas la "vraie vie" [because he silently, abstinently disdains "idiocies", everything that is not "real life"]' (Bounoure 1991: 49n1). The rejoinder in the second half of the section also includes the first question of the poem, all the more striking on account of its sibilance and fluidity due to the elision of the *e caduc* in the midst of the line, subverting the visual break of the comma: 'Qu'est l'ivresse, Amis? [What is drunkenness, Friends?]' (48). The disdain of the MOI for the overenthusiastic outbursts of the first half is cemented by the interrogatory eruption of the narrator-poet into the piece, in a challenge to traditional beliefs.

The ecosensitive ending to the section is intensely evocative, with the *staccato* effect of the 49th line (syllabically divided three-one-one, according to the commas) augmenting the force of the narrator-poet's exasperation with 'Les Amis', the representatives of society: 'J'aime autant, mieux, même, / Pourrir dans l'étang [I'd like as much, better, even, / To rot in the pond]' (49–50). Obliteration of the self through positively entropic dissolution into the local ecosystem is preferred to continued subsistence in a drunken reality lacking care for the nonhuman world, validating Edward Ahearn's emphasis in *Rimbaud* on the young poet's 'desire to extinguish human existence and to merge entirely with the ageless processes of the natural' (Ahearn 1983: 279). The semantic link created by the recurring /r/ ('l'ivresse [drunkenness]' (48); 'Pourrir [To rot]' (50); 'affreuse crème [horrible cream]' (51)) raises the particularly disquieting spectre of a putrid fate for both 'Les Amis' and the MOI due to drunkenness (though the narrator-poet is *seeking* oblivion, whence his empowerment, lacked by the unreflective friends). As 'Comédie de la soif' continues, the narrator-poet not only more stridently rejects tradition (in which the nonhuman world is subjugated), but also contemplates a solution to the confusion of his existence, caused by industrialization. Ecopoetic tensions and feelings of discord are consequently heightened for the second and fourth parts of the poem.

'L'Esprit' and 'Le Pauvre songe': conflict with poetic and societal traditions

The second section of 'Comédie de la soif' is similar to the third in its hexasyllabic-pentasyllabic structure, as well as in its bipartite argumentation: a mythological concept ('Éternelles Ondines/Divisez l'eau fine [Eternal Water Spirits,/Divide the fine water]' (25–26)) is juxtaposed against the rebuttal of said notion by the narrator-poet ('Non, plus ces boissons pures [No, no more of these pure drinks]' (33)). The ethos of 'L'Esprit' ['The Spirit'] differs from that of 'Les Amis', however, because it does not involve a refutation of an idea espoused by society in itself, but rather of one sustained by Romantic tradition. There are notable differences in presentation throughout the section, on account of the alternation of hexasyllabic and pentasyllabic lines (contesting the more straightforward division found in 'Les Amis', of which the first half, comprising lines with an even number of syllables, is contrasted against the second half, containing lines with an odd number of syllables). This uneven prosodic structure complements the subject matter, since lines containing an odd number of syllables were the medium of choice for popular song. 'L'Esprit' is thus the most musical part of the whole work. The imbalance of syllables around the midpoint in the pentasyllabic lines provokes a sensation of fluidity and commotion, compounded by the alteration in meter from one line to the next. The destabilizing effect is underscored in the first couplet by the inadmissible plural-singular rhyme between 'Ondines [Water Spirits]' (25) and 'fine' (26), devaluing the epic sentiment of the first half, and prefiguring the myriad cases of unacceptable rhyme that follow. The invocation of the sea further subverts the supra-human imprecations of the first half of the section, in which 'chers [dear]' (31) is coupled with 'mer [sea]' (32). This systematic prosodic manipulation bears out Françoise d'Eaubonne's assertion in *Verlaine et Rimbaud, ou la fausse évasion* that 'Rimbaud [...] voulait, par éthique, "le dérèglement systématique de tous les sens" [Rimbaud wanted, ethically, "the systematic upset of all the senses"]' (D'Eaubonne 1960: 14). Each quatrain of 'L'Esprit'

demonstrates inadmissibility of rhyme: in the fourth stanza, 'filleule [godchild]' (37) grates against 'sans gueules [mouthless]' (39); in the third, there is a striking feminine rhyme between a plural noun and third-person plural verb ('verres [cups]' (34); 'désaltèrent [quench my thirst]' (36)). The conflict of the narrator-poet with lyrical paradigms is thus highlighted, given that the 'waters' of the epic tradition can no longer quench his thirst.

Despite the apostrophe of the elements and 'Vénus, sœur de l'azur [Venus, sister of the azure]' (27) by 'L'Esprit', the second quatrain has the air of almost grinding to a halt for want of eco-poetic irrigation, given the repetitiveness of the quadrisyllabic anaphora in 'Dites-moi la neige [Tell me of the snow]' (30) and 'Dites-moi la mer [Tell me of the sea]' (32). The actions of the epic 'Chansonnier [Singer]' (37) have left Rimbaud with a 'soif si folle [truly maddening thirst]' (38), unable to irrigate his poetry with ecological insight. A reduction of the interference of society in the nonhuman world is necessary to re-establish a harmonious poetic space, as the diminishing presence of masculine rhymes in the second half of the part suggests (the third and fourth quatrains are exclusively composed of feminine rhymes). The psychosocial conflict of the narrator-poet is foregrounded by the inversion of strophic indentation between the two stanzas that open each argument, given that the first quatrain is aligned to the right, whereas the third is to the left. The visual contrast in the argument makes the sensation of aridity at the end of the section all the more emphatic, especially when coupled with the hypotyposis of 'Hydre-intime sans gueules/Qui mine-et désole [Intimate, mouthless hydra/That consumes and ravages]' (39–40). 'L'Esprit' thus concludes with the narrator-poet once more struggling with tradition amidst ecological phenomena.

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'Le Pauvre songe' ['The Pauper Dreams'] offers a hexasyllabic monologue in three cinquains, evoking solitude and sadness: 'Si mon mal se résigne [If my suffering ever ends]' (58). Has the internal conflict and vain wish to revert to 'Le voyageur ancien [The traveller of yore]' (65) been provoked by a past of excess in sophisticated society? Does this part elaborate the view of the earlier MOI, setting the tone for 'Conclusion'? The ecological motif of the first stanza, 'Peut-être un soir m'attend/Où je boirai tranquille [Perhaps an evening awaits me/When, calm, I'll drink]' (53–54), recalls the earlier sections of the poem, and the melancholy surrounding the pauper's exclusion from 'l'auberge verte [the green inn]' (66) deserves to be envisioned as a highly charged allegory for environmental degradation. It can thus be reasonably assumed that 'Le Pauvre songe' arises from the ecosensitively interjecting MOI of the previous parts, especially since much regret is evident in the protagonist's hypothesising of a release from everyday anguish through death: 'mourrai plus content [I'll die happier]' (56). Not only is the pauper/narrator-poet long-suffering due to the pressures of the industrializing world, but he has also been marginalized due to the breakneck pace of progress (ironically affording him a privileged position from which he can scrutinize the shortcomings of humanity in the face of ecological issues). As a melancholic and imperilled outsider, the protagonist of 'Le Pauvre songe' incarnates Mortimer-Sandilands' vision of the way in which 'being corporeally vulnerable in a specifically damaged landscape [...] offers [...] acute insight into the historical, multiple and daily losses [...] in the natural world, into the fragility of human life in the midst of these losses' (Mortimer-Sandilands 2010: 343). The pauper's environment becomes both a mirror and partner in a self-interrogatory quest for empathy in a world that has practically dispensed with longstanding referents and concern for other beings, especially since the two locations that he evokes represent hopelessly idealized visions for someone without the means to achieve them: 'Choisirai-je le Nord/Ou le Pays des Vignes? [Will I choose the North/Or the Land of Vineyards?]' (60–61).

The dash at the beginning of the final line of the cinquain underlines the conspicuous dejection of the pauper/narrator-poet as he realizes the fruitlessness of hoping for a better world: '- Ah! songer est indigne/Puisque c'est pure perte! [- Oh! dreaming is shameful/Because it's pure loss!]' (62–63). Given that a world has been closed to the pauper (enforcing his return to a precivilized

state), Kristin Ross' understanding of Rimbaud's worldview in *The Emergence of Social Space* holds particular resonance, since she sees the young poet's work as 'a kind of charting of social movement in geographic terms' (Ross 1988: 76). The protagonist of 'Le Pauvre songe' has much in common with the swathes of citizens dispossessed and displaced both in and from their own cities at the end of the nineteenth century, subject to the vicissitudes of urbanization. The latter stanzas of the fourth part of 'Comédie de la soif' contain an inversion of the rhyme scheme in the first cinquain (from M-F-F-M-M to F-M-M-F-F), such that an increasingly feminine framework provides the rhythm for the growing disillusionment of the pauper/narrator-poet with the state of affairs that has brought him to the brink of despair. As the poem reaches its crescendo, the patriarchal objectification and diminishment of the nonhuman world through the work of male urban planners (in addition to the debilitating exigencies of tradition) attracts the vitriol of the narrator-poet, not only augmenting the tone of an ecopoetic struggle, but also prefiguring essentialist oblivion in nature as the only remaining solution to this crisis.

'Conclusion': an ecopoetic ethos of essentiality and positive entropy

The two decasyllabic quatrains at the close of 'Comédie de la soif' differ markedly from the other parts of the poem in terms of their prosody. This shift may be an acknowledgement by Rimbaud of the significance of his meter. Since decasyllabic lines are the basis for 'heroic verse' (*chansons de geste*), the versification and ecological motif of these two stanzas can be interpreted as representing an evolution of poetic tradition. Rimbaud continues to be rebellious within the framework of epic verse, ignoring the proviso of a caesura following the fourth syllable in each of the eight lines. In five instances, he overrides the nominal pause with a grammatical link (68; 69; 71; 72; 74); once, elision eliminates it (70); in the two most remarkable cases, the pause is overridden through the selection of a word that encloses the theoretical point of accentuation in the line (73; 75). This sustained subversion is emblematic of Rimbaud's challenge to societal conventions, emphasized in Ahearn's claim that 'the *Derniers Vers* [...] represent a kind of super-pastoral poetry, moving from the human-historical-societal setting toward identification with the essence/of the natural, the natural for humans finally being identified with death' (Ahearn 1983: 284-285). Given that the crescendo of the poem has been significantly despondent in the face of humanity's lack of respect for nature, 'Conclusion' implies that Rimbaud wishes to transcend Romantic/pastoral traditions, as part of an effort to establish a new ethos for society and ecopoesis.

The positively entropic move at the end of the piece, highlighted by the inadmissible singular-plural feminine rhyme between 'sans guide [aimless]' (72) and 'humides [damp]' (74), draws attention to the fulfilment offered by fully sensuous contact with nature (as well as to the importance of biochemical insight for ecopoetic irrigation), as the narrator-poet wishes to 'fondre-où fond ce nuage sans guide [to dissolve where that aimless cloud dissolves]' (72). The necessity for revivification of poetic space is foregrounded by the similarity of the F-M-F-M rhymes in /i/ in the first quatrain, suggesting the failings of outmoded systems through the inadmissibility of masculine-feminine rhyme, and underscoring the subjection of the nonhuman world to humanity's will, given the pairing of 'prairie [meadow]' (68) and 'asservie [enslaved]' (70). Rimbaud completes 'Comédie de la soif' with a movement that generates an essentialist vision from the myriad unsustainable anthropocentric concepts and substances outlined in the preceding parts. Society's industrializing activities are relegated to a background role, and ecological realities dwarf human concerns. The finale of the poem hints at what Timothy Morton in *The Ecological Thought* terms an all-encompassing 'mesh' (Morton 2010: 28), as well as at the importance of paying heed to the nonhuman world in ecopoesis and sustainable existence.

Environmental sensitivity, ecopoetic consciousness

'Comédie de la soif' highlights a nineteenth-century sense of psychological and spiritual diminishment due to the devaluation of nature, especially in the narrator-poet's stark condemnation of the flawed enjoyment that older generations of humanity take from nature in 'Les Parents':

Au soleil sans imposture
Que faut-il à l'homme? boire.

MOI - Mourir aux fleuves barbares.

[Beneath the sun, free of all pretence,
What is necessary for man? to drink.

ME - To die by the barbarous rivers.] (6–8)

The dearth of collective sensitivity to the necessity of ecosystemic balance between humanity and the nonhuman world concerns Rimbaud. It is implied that society has lost its way in the industrializing rush of modernization, designating the utopia of symbiosis with nature as an almost unreachable ideal. Throughout the piece, the narrator-poet struggles to understand his environment, relating his perplexity in the face of everyday situations through language that seeks to identify human experience with ecological processes ('J'aime-autant, mieux, même,/Pourrir dans l'étang [I'd like as much, better, even,/To rot in the pond]' (49–50)), in a manner that evokes Terblanche's judicious allusion not only to the necessity of synchronic relationships with nature, but also to 'the inclusivity of human processes within earth's processes' (Terblanche 2012: 29). Rimbaud's prosodic subversion and references to nonhuman presences offer a particularly incisive psychosocial insight into the latter half of the nineteenth century, since his interrogation of the relationship between civilization and the nonhuman world reveals as much about human anxieties as it does about the quasi-impossibility of post-Romantic complicity with the environment: 'Non, plus ces boissons pures,/Ces fleurs d'eau pour verres [No, no more of these pure drinks,/These water-flowers for cups]' (33–34). Rimbaud's ecopoetic opposition to superficial admiration of nature corroborates Kate Soper's claim in *What Is Nature?* that ecosensitivity may serve as 'a register of Western civilization's anxieties and divisions of opinion about its own qualities, activities and achievements' (Soper 1995: 74). The narrator-poet of 'Comédie de la soif' is seeking something more profound than superficially pastoral enjoyment of wild settings, and he challenges traditional idealizations: 'Plus ces paysages [No more of these landscapes]' (47).

Rimbaud subtly conjures up tensions in the dualistic conception of the environment as both a maternal figure and an objectified commodity. His resounding evocation of human displacement and dispossession, harmonized with images and prosodic subversion underscoring detachment from complicity with the nonhuman world, support Edward Relph's recognition in *Place and Placelessness* of 'the weakening of distinct and diverse experiences and identities of places' (Relph 1976: 6) in the modern era. The psychosocial sterility manifest in Rimbaud's invective is linked to a sense of the intricate entwinement of music, ecopoiesis and character:

Chansonnier, ta filleule
C'est ma soif si folle;
Hydre-intime, sans gueules
Qui mine-et désolé.

[Singer, your godchild
Is my truly maddening thirst;
Intimate, mouthless hydra
That consumes and ravages.] (37–40)

Aural phenomena contribute to the destabilizing effect of subversive prosody, coming to underscore the vibrancy appropriate to a harmonious poetic space, in which there is ecosystemic balance between the nonhuman world and society. The narrator-poet becomes surrounded by and immersed in the nonhuman world at the dénouement of the poem, presaging Daniel Grimley's concept of 'attunement' (Grimley 2011: 397) to the natural world. Rimbaud underscores the extent to which it is crucial for humanity to interface with natural elements in order to achieve true understanding and respect for the environment.

Ultimately, 'Comédie de la soif' not only foregrounds (on a comprehensible scale) nineteenth-century ideas of humanity becoming disconnected from the other constituents of life on earth, but also provides an insight into the evolution of French environmental awareness during the turbulent era of urbanization. Rimbaud's verse poetry of 1872 merits interpretation as heralding modern ecological concerns down to its very versification. His prosodic irregularities, which could be interpreted as promising mutations in the evolution of poetic space, echo the startling ecosystemic changes of the nineteenth century and the psychosocial effects of such a process, making the 18-year-old French prodigy an important harbinger of environmentalism.

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ⁱ A guide to the principles of nineteenth-century French versification can be found in Clive Scott's *A Question of Syllables* (Scott 1986: 198–205).